

Case Study #4: Intramural & Extramural Scientific Research Collaboration Within the Same IC

The Chief of the Chemistry intramural laboratory has indicated to an IC extramural Health Scientist Administrator (HSA) that he and his entire group would be delighted if it were possible for the HSA to spend some time in the Chemistry intramural laboratory at any time that is suitable to him. In his invitation, he stated that the HSA's expertise on agents that interact with DNA matches a major interest of his laboratory and it would be mutually beneficial to pool their intellectual resources in this effort. The HSA indicates that collaborating with this intramural group would be directly pertinent to the mission of his IC and that the interaction will enhance his ability to maintain the expertise and skills in his basic research area, which in turn will benefit his responsibilities within the IC as a Review or Program Director. He requests approval to consult with the intramural investigators in this capacity.

The HSA's immediate supervisor has no objections to the HSA's collaborating on this or other research activities with the intramural laboratory in the scope and form described above if it does not impact his performance of his current duties. However, based on the posted descriptions of "outside activities", it is ambiguous to the supervisor whether this activity would comprise an "outside activity" and what steps, if any, are needed to get it cleared.

Is this a permissible activity?

Yes, this is considered an official activity.

Since this is not a part of the HSA's official position or current assigned responsibilities, could participation occur during regular tour of duty hours?

Yes. The HSA could participate during his official duty hours unless his supervisor feels that the employee does not have sufficient time to do his current assignments and the intramural collaboration. He/she may also participate outside his official duty hours.

Would this activity present any level of conflict for the HSA in his position as a review administrator or program director? Are there other issues that must be considered, such as impact of interactions with extramural collaborations with laboratories outside of NIH with the principle intramural laboratory?

Even though the collaboration is considered to be part of the HSA's official duties, conflict of interest must be managed with the investigators in the intramural laboratory and collaborating extramural investigators. The HSA would need to recuse himself from the review or program administration of any grant applications, contract proposals, or awards listing the intramural investigators as key personnel or collaborators. The HSA should not share any confidential or privileged information (e.g., grant applications, contract proposals, progress reports, summary statements) with members of the intramural laboratory that he/she has access to in the regular performance of his duties. The HSA should also not take unfair advantage of any ideas, hypotheses, approaches, results, conclusions, etc, that he/she gains through his access to confidential materials accessed in the performance of HSA duties.

What steps are needed for approval?

Approval is obtained by the intramural investigator preparing a memo of understanding that invites the HSA to participate in the planned activities and includes any relevant information such as activities, meeting schedules, hours per week, and length of collaboration. The HSA's supervisor would need to approve the activity and sign the memo. The memo would provide documentation for the employee's file.